

Dear Connecticut legislator,

I am writing to explain my serious concerns around and objections to Bill 5429. While the goals that drive support for the bill are reasonable, I believe this bill is a clumsy, damaging and counterproductive way to try to achieve those goals. If enacted, the Bill could have very bad consequences for my family personally and would force us to consider relocating to another state, even though our children have happily lived here their whole lives. I sincerely urge you to oppose this bill.

My family and I have lived in Westport for about fifteen years. About five years ago, we decided to buy a home closer to the train station so that my commute to New York City would be reduced. As substantial development occurred around the Saugatuck train station in Westport, I found myself more and more frequently stuck in traffic as I attempted to exit the station in the evening. Coupled with the increasingly long train ride (for various reasons, Metro North trains now take longer than they did ten to fifteen years ago), the problem got so severe that we actually moved.

Now I can walk from the station and get home in time for dinner with my kids. We now live within a half mile of the train station in a wonderful, culturally diverse (my own family is biracial), warm and welcoming community. Traffic on our street and connecting streets is very light, so my children can ride bikes and play on their scooters without worrying at all.

I strongly believe this Bill could undermine everything I have worked so hard to achieve in terms of my family's living conditions, with minimal benefit to anyone except real estate developers who might tear down a lovely home in our quiet residential neighborhood to erect a multi-family condo complex for a quick profit. If this legislation passes, the mere possibility of a single family home being converted into a 15-unit complex will immediately drive down property values across all neighborhoods in Westport located within a half mile of the train station (and also likely affect homes on connected streets even beyond the half mile radius). This will unfairly bring direct harm to families who made it a priority to minimize the commute time of the working parent(s), which in fact includes many working mothers in our neighborhood who value the ease of access to our train station (especially in an emergency situation).

Following the Covid crisis, the tax base of Connecticut has benefited immensely from the trend of New Yorkers relocating here, especially to Fairfield county. These families are looking for the combination of having homes in safe areas where they can also maintain convenient access to New York City. Bill 5429 will only discourage this migration as it introduces the risk of haphazard development in any of these neighborhoods near a train station. It also diminishes the broader appeal of living in Connecticut by highlighting the risk of haphazardly conceived legislative changes that could do real harm to neighborhoods and property values.

It is important to emphasize who chooses to live near a train station. At least in the lower portion of the state, these are generally families who are commuting into NYC for work. How does it make sense for Connecticut to punish these hard-working families who contribute so much to the tax base? Encouraging haphazard multi-family development around train stations will be a net economic loss for our state coffers and undermine the programs we all want to see appropriately funded. Any tiny revenue benefit from a few condo developments will be more than offset by the negative impact on property values in surrounding areas and the broader discouragement of new families seeking to move to our state. It is unfairly punitive to families who happen to be located in affected zones and will rob many children of the safe and secure low traffic streets on which they play.

Post-Covid, with many New York City office workers now having the option to work from home a couple days a week, Connecticut has a wonderful opportunity to attract successful professionals who previously were discouraged by the prospect of a lengthy five day per week commute. Towns like Westport are an economic

engine for Connecticut and drive our tax base. We should be passing laws that encourage this positive economic dynamic. Instead, Bill 5429 is almost spectacularly well-designed to ruin it. Who wants to buy a house in a quiet neighborhood when you never know if the lot next door will be sold to a developer looking to make a quick buck? In such a scenario, a family could be financially destroyed as their home equity is instantly wiped away. Please understand that families take factors like this into consideration when making the most important financial decision of their lives, where to buy a home. Again, the mere *possibility* of such haphazard development will cause instantaneous economic harm to Connecticut families the moment this legislation is passed, which is what makes this legislation so damaging and foolish.

Another related issue to take into account is that densifying areas around train stations will only exacerbate existing traffic problems, discourage use of mass transit and deter families with parents who work in New York City and other commutable locations from looking for homes in Connecticut. Traffic around the Westport train station is a huge issue at the moment and threatens the practical viability of the station itself; we need easier access to train stations, not more congestion. By densifying areas around train stations, Bill 5429 will only worsen traffic problems that are already at critical levels. In many ways, areas around train stations are the last place we should be focusing on in terms of residential densification. From a climate change perspective, we want to PROMOTE use of trains, not prevent it by fueling congestion. It's like putting a football stadium or shopping mall directly next to the entrance of an airport. We want our public transit infrastructure to be accessible, not clogged!

Thank you for carefully considering my perspective as someone whose family will be directly and seriously harmed by this potential legislation. The goals of the legislation are laudable, but the impact will do much more harm than good.

Sincerely,
Rob Hordon
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Westport, CT